Dr. R .Geetha

Associate professor

Department of English

Bangalore University

Bangalore, Karnataka, India

beenamuniyappa@gmail.com

Significance of Media Education and pedagogical implications.

Abstract

Media education is not about having right answer, rather it is about asking the right questions. Media issues are always complex, contradictory and controversial. Here the Educators role is not to impart knowledge but to facilitate the process of enquiry and dialogue. Media should involve a constant questioning of received wisdom, a willingness to step back and reflect on one's experience and an ability to develop and test out theories and explanations.

Key words: Education, media, synthesise, evaluate, texts, pedagogy, approach, theories, ideology

Media education is the process through which individuals become media literates and are able to critically understand the nature, technique and impacts of media messages and productions. There is a growing awareness of the need to connect classroom learning to the real world and to bring media content into the classroom for analysis, evaluation and discovery. Media acknowledges and builds on the positive, creative and pleasurable dimensions of popular culture. It incorporates the production of media texts and critical thinking - decoding, analysing, synthesizing and evaluating media - to help us navigate

through an increasingly complex media landscape. This landscape includes not only traditional and digital media but also popular culture texts from fashion to mall culture. Media education is not about having the right answer; rather it is about asking the right questions. Media issues are always complex, contradictory and controversial; here the educator's role is not to impart knowledge but to facilitate the process of enquiry and dialogue.

Media education in pedagogy raises many questions, the first and the foremost one is, why should we be teaching young generation about media? Most rationales for media education tend to begin by documenting the statistical significance of the media in the contemporary world.

Surveys repeatedly show that, in most industrialized countries, children now spend more time watching television then they do in schools/colleges or indeed any other activity apart from sleeping. (Livingstone and Bovill 2001 Ride out. et. al 1999)

If we add to this the time they devote to films, magazines, computer games and popular music, it is clear that the media constitutes by far their most significant leisure-time pursuit. This thought leads to broader assertions about the economic, social and cultural importance of the media in modern societies. The media is the major industry generating profit and employment - they provide us with most of our information and they offer us ideas, images and representations, both factual and fictional that inevitably shapes our view of reality.

Undoubtedly the major contemporary means of cultural expression and communication and to become an active participant in public life necessarily involves making use of modern media. It is often argued, that media has now has taken the place of socializing influence in contemporary society. As Roger Silverstone (1999) argues, "The media are now

at the core of experience, the heart of our capacity or incapacity to make sense of the world in which we live", and suggests, "It is, for this reason, we should study them". In these terms, therefore the argument for media education is essentially an argument for making the curriculum relevant to the lives of our young children and to the wider society.

Our approach to media education is bound to depend upon the assumptions we make about the relationships between media and their audiences, contemporary, social and cultural changes of having a significant impact on the nature of children's experiences of the media.

In the 1970s, we can identify another paradigm shift, derived into the academy. The key development was 'Screen theory'. The screen was the most significant vehicle for new development in semiotics, structuralism and psychoanalytic theory, post-structuralism and Marxist theories of ideology. The difficult role of screen education was to suggest how these academic approaches might be applied to classroom instructions.

The most influential exponent of this approach was undoubtedly Len Masterman. In fact, Masterman was very critical of what he regarded as the academic elitism of screen theory; share the central concerns of that theory with questions of language, ideology and representation. The fundamental aim here was to reveal the constructed nature of media texts, and thereby to show how media representations reinforced ideologies of dominant groups within society.

A fuller analysis of the evolution of media education would need to locate these approaches within the changing social and cultural climate of their times, and in particular to relate them to the on-going struggles for control over educational policymaking.

With these qualifications in mind, however, it is possible to read this history in terms of two contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, the development of media education is part

of a wider move towards democratization - a process whereby students out of school cultures are gradually recognised as valid and worthy of consideration in the school curriculum. In these terms, media education could be seen as one dimension of the 'progressive' educational strategies that began to gain widespread acceptance in the '60s and '70s. Particularly students of English by increasingly encouraged writing about their everyday experiences; to discuss the poetry of popular songs and debate contemporary social issues. Such strategies attempted to 'validate' students' culture and to build connections between the cultures of the school and doors of the home and the peer group.

This move reflected the growing recognition that the traditional academic curriculum was inadequate for the large majority of students, particularly for working-class students. Even in the work of Lewis and Thompson, one can detect an acknowledgement that teachers had to do begin by working with the cultures that students brought with them to the classroom, rather seeking merely to impose the values of 'high' culture. In more recent years, this democratization of the curriculum should also be seen as part of a wider political move, which is apparent in different ways in the work of Williams and in the project of screen education. The attempt to include popular culture within the curriculum represented a direct challenge to the elitism of established literary culture; and in this respect, it was implicitly informed by a wider class politics.

On the other hand, however, this history is also one of defensiveness. It reflects a long-standing suspension of the media and popular culture that might be seen as a defining characteristic of the modern education system. Despite the growing inclusiveness of the curriculum, all these approaches seek in different ways to inoculate or protect students against what are assumed to be the negative effects of the media. Such an approach is implicitly premised on a notion that the media as an enormously powerful influence and of

children as particularly vulnerable to manipulation. Teaching about the media - enabling them to analyse how media texts are constructed, and to understand the economic functions of the media industries is seen as a way of ' empowering ' them to resist such influences. In the process, it is argued children will become rational consumers, able to view the media in a 'critical' and distanced way.

This defensiveness may have several motivations, which take on the different significance at different times and in different national and cultural contexts. In the work of Lewis and his followers, there is a powerful form of cultural defensiveness - that is an attempt to protect children from the media on the grounds of their apparent lack of cultural value, and thereby to lead the children onto superior forms of art and literature. While they are distinctly unfashionable in some circles, such motivations nevertheless often underlie more apparently 'objective' or political concerns. They are often reinforced by resistance to what is seen as cultural imperialism.

In the United States, for e.g., Media education is strongly motivated by anxieties about the effects of sex and violence in the media, and to some extent about the media's role in promoting consumerism or materialism. Here again, the media is seen to be primarily responsible for inculcating these false beliefs or behaviours - for encouraging children to believe that all their problems can be solved through violence, or through the acquisition of material goods. And it is through rigorous training in media analysis that such dangers can be prevented or overcome. (Anderson, 1980)

Media education is proposed as a way of dealing with some very wide and complex social problems - and if the media is protein be identified as the overriding cause of these problems, media education frequently seems to be seen at the solution. In the process, the need to consider any of the more intractable causes of such problems - or any more through

going and potentially unpalatable ways of dealing with them - is neatly sidestepped. For example, if we can blame the media for the rise in violence, media education becomes a sensible alternative to gun control, or to address poverty or racism. Media education, therefore, comes to be seen, not just as an alternative form of media regulation - liberal alternative to censorship, perhaps - but as a means of modifying more general attitude and behaviour (Bragg. 2001)

As in media research, these arguments tend to recur as new media enter the scene. For example, the advent of the internet has seen a resurgence of many of these protectionist arguments for media education. Here, media education is yet again perceived by some as a kind of inoculation - means of preventing contamination, if not a keeping young generation away from the media entirely. In this scenario, the potential benefits and pleasures of the media are neglected in favour of an exclusive- and in some instances, highly exaggerated - emphasis on the harm they are assumed to cause.

Yet however, diverse these concerns maybe, the positions that students and teachers appear to occupy here remain remarkably consistent. By and large, students are seen to be particularly at risk from the negative influence of the media, and as seemingly unable to resist their power; while teachers are somehow assumed to be able to stand outside this process, providing students with the tools of critical analysis which will 'liberate' them.

In each case, media education is regarded as a means of counteracting children's apparent fascination and pleasure in the media - and hence their belief in values the media is same to promote. Media education will, it is assumed; automatically lead young generation on to an appreciation of high culture, to more morally healthy forms of behaviour, or to more rational, politically correct beliefs. It is seen to offer nothing less than a means of salvation.

To some degree, all the approaches outlined about have remained influential. Yet in the last decade nations have begun to move into a further new phase. While protectionist views have been far from superseded, there has been a gradual evolution towards a less defensive approach. In general, the countries with the most 'mature' forms of practice in media education that is, those which have the longest history, and the most consistent pattern of development - have moved well beyond protectionism (Carlsson, 1999)

There have been several reasons for this shift. This reflects changing views of young people's relationships with the media, both in academic research and in public debate more generally. The notion of the media as bearers of a singular set of ideologies and beliefs – or indeed as uniformly harmful or lacking in cultural value - is no longer so easy to sustain of course, there are still significant limits in the diversity of views and cultural forms represented in the mainstream media, but the development of modern communication has resulted in a more heterogeneous, even fragmented, environment in which the boundaries between high culture and popular culture have become extremely blurred. Likewise, the notion that the media is all powerful 'consciousness industry ' – they can single handedly impose false values and passive audiences - has also come into question. Contemporary research suggests that youngsters are much more autonomous and critical audience then they are conventionally assume to be; and this is increasingly recognised by the media industries themselves. To some extent, this shift is also part of a broader development in thinking about regulation of the media. Technological changes broaden theoretical debates in academic studies of the media debates - ranging from relationship between pleasure and ideology to specific pedagogical issues. How are we to identify what students already know about the media? How do they acquire critical or conceptual understandings? How do they learn to use the media to express them and to communicate with others? How do they relate to the academic discourse of the subject to their own experiences as media users? How can we

evaluate evidence of their learning and how can we be sure that media education actually makes a difference?

In addressing these questions, approaches to media education; and in many respects, it reflects a broader challenge to 'modernist conception' of education as a means of developing forms of 'critical consciousness' or rationality. Indeed, to some extent, it emerges from a more widespread rethinking of some of the earlier assumptions of 'progressive' educational practices. However, the aim here is not merely to deconstruct the certainties of previous generations of purportedly radical educator: it is also to provide the basis for a more coherent conception of what counts as learning.

In addition to these more 'internal' questions, there has also been a range of broader developments that have complex implications for media educators. To some degree, they make the case for media education all the more urgent; yet they also suggest that it needs to be extended - and perhaps rethought.

The proliferation of media technologies, the commercialization and globalisation of media markets, the fragmentation of mass audiences and the rise of interactivity are all fundamentally transforming young people's everyday experiences of media. In this new environment, youngsters have increasingly come to be seen as a valuable target market for the media industries. Youngsters today can you gain access to adult media, via cable TV or video on internet, much more easily than their parents ever could; but they also have their own 'media spheres' which adults may find increasingly difficult to penetrate or understand. Digital media and particularly the internet - significantly increases the potential for active participation; yet for the large majority of youngsters who do not yet have access to these opportunities, there is a growing danger of exclusion and disenfranchisement.

On the contrary they reflect much broader tendencies in the contemporary world, which have been widely discussed and debated by a range of social theorists. At least in western countries, the shift towards a 'post-industrial' consumer society is seen to have destabilized existing patterns of employment, settlement and social life. Established social institutions, the rules of conduct of civil society and traditional conceptions of citizenship are increasingly being called into question. Many social commentators agree that the contemporary world is characterized by a growing sense of fragmentation and individualization. Long standing systems of belief and ways of life are being eroded and familiar hierarchies overthrown. In this context, identity comes to be seen as a matter of individual choice: and in the process, it is argued, individuals have also become more diverse – and to some extent more autonomous.

Our approach to media education is bound to depend upon the assumptions we make about the relationships between media and their audiences. To what extent do audiences have the power to create their own meanings and pleasure? Clearly these are questions that cannot be answered in the abstract. Contemporary social and cultural changes are having a significant impact on the nature of youngster's experiences of the media. These changes cannot afford to be ignored by media educators.

Nevertheless, these new technologies will inevitably calling into questions the boundaries of "media" as a discrete curriculum area. As a media converge, logic of separating verbal and visual media, orb electronic technologies and non-electronic technologies, will come under increasing strain. In the process, the boundaries between previously discrete areas of the curriculum and particularly those that are broadly concerned with culture and communication may come to seem quite obsolete. Whether the positive potential of this

situation will be realised, or whether it will result merely in incoherence and confusion, will have to remain an open question.

Media should involve a constant questioning of received wisdom, a willingness to step back and reflect on one's experience and an ability to develop and test out new theories and explanations. Crucially, this means that concepts should not be fixed or reified: they need to be seen as tools to be used and as a body of knowledge to be ingested and then regurgitated. Students do not need to learn theory, so much as the ability to theorise.

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